DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 141 586 CE 011 623

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TITLE Needs of the Lifelong Learner: The View of Agents and Consumers.
INSTITUTION Pennsylvania State Dept. of Education, Harrisburg.
PUB DATE Apr 77
NOTE 18p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; Admission Criteria; Adult Education; Adults; Community Colleges; *Continuous Learning; Counseling Services; Courses; Credits; *Educational Attitudes; *Educational Needs; Educational Research; Higher Education; *Needs Assessment; Student Financial Aid
IDENTIFIERS *Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT

A survey employing the Delphi technique was used to explore lifelong learning ne in Pennsylvania. Respondents included agents (those involved in the educational system such as administrators, faculty, broadcasters, librarian, and others) and consumers (representatives of groups of people who might pursue lifelong learning). Results revealed differences between these groups, consumers seeing more needs than agents. Differences also existed among agents. Community college staff readily accepted open admission, while staff from State-related universities and private colleges opposed the idea. The general view of the groups surveyed seemed to be that lifelong learners have a broad range of needs and that those learners must bear a substantial portion of the cost of those services. Results showed primary needs as including limited requirements for admission to educational programs to encourage broad participation, widespread availability of academic and vocational counseling, and development of tests to supplement the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests for crediting experience. The authors note that conflicts and disagreements among the respondents prevented simple interpretation of the data, concluding that the lifelong learner has a great many needs and people currently in the system do not yet agree on how to respond to them. The results of the survey, organized into eight categories, are appended. (SH)

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The View of Agents and Consumers

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Needs of the Lifelong Learner

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April 1977

CE 011 623

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Summary

The authors conducted a survey to explore lifelong learning needs in Pennsylvania. The primary needs included: limited requirements for admission to educational programs to encourage broad participation; widespread availability of academic and vocational counseling; and development of tests to supplement the CLEP tests for crediting experience. Additional needs were financial aid for lifelong learners and part-time students; more accessible courses; remedial courses; and some type of reciprocity for credit transfer to allow students to move easily from school to school.

Respondents to the survey included agents (those involved in the educational system as administrators, faculty, broadcasters, librarians and others) and consumers (representatives of groups of people who might pursue lifelong learning). There were differences between these groups, consumers seeing more needs than agents. Females identified more needs than males. Differences also existed among agents, depending on the type of institution they represented. Community college staff readily accepted open admission, while staff from state-related universities and private colleges opposed the idea. General disagreement, apparently between the same two factions, also occurred as to what is and is not creditable. This disagreement could create difficulties in transfering credit and awarding credit for experience.

The group responding to the survey was quite diverse. This diversity proved valuable in identifying areas of difference and possible future conflict. The general view of the group seemed to be that lifelong learners have a broad range of needs and that those learners must bear a substantial portion of the cost of those services, possibly more than students do at present.

Conflicts and disagreements among the respondents prevent simple interpretation of the data. The lifelong learner has a great many needs and people currently in the system do not yet agree on how to respond to them. Therefore, it would seem appropriate to develop better rapport among the institutions before trying to address the needs of the lifelong learner.

Introduction

The lifelong learning steering committee of the Department of Education was interested in knowing the lifelong learning needs of Pennsylvanians. After much discussion of procedures for determining those needs, the committee decided on a survey employing the Delphi technique. Initial responses were solicited from a broad spectrum of individuals representative of groups concerned with lifelong learning. Two broad categories of people were asked to respond: agents (including administration and faculty of institutions of higher education, librarians, broadcasters, state Department of Education staff, legislators and others the committee determined to be purveyors of learning) and consumers (including representatives of organizations representing people with lifelong learning needs, e.g., labor unions, women's groups, student groups and others).

Initial questionnaires calling for open-ended responses were mailed to about 275 persons. More than 100 responded to the first round, a task requiring considerable effort. The amount of time involved, plus the promise of more rounds to come, may have resulted in reluctance to become involved. Of those responding to the first round, 75 continued to respond through the final round of the survey.

Results

Results of the survey, presented in the Appendix, are organized into eight categories. The needs presented were supplied by first-round respondents; the percentages represent responses to the final round.

I. Admissions Requirements

Open admissions and new ways to assess students were the highest priority needs, with stricter requirements for those in career programs than those in self-enrichment programs seen as a low priority. Enthusiasm for open admission was very strong among representatives of community colleges and state-owned colleges. Respondents associated with private colleges and state-related universities showed considerably less enthusiasm.

There was some debate about how to handle open admissions, some holding out for locally oriented programs designed to meet local needs, and others suggesting that the PDE standardize admission requirements with help from the institutions involved. Responses in this area and others suggested, however, that most agents do not want PDE control of matters of school policy.

Some respondents expressed concern about the expense of open admissions, pointing out that a reasonable rate of tuition would be a very good measure of the student's commitment. The major cost is associated with increased numbers of students, many of whom may need more supportive services than the current population. Some suggested that the adult student should bear the entire cost of schooling. The feeling of most was that institutions could handle the costs associated with open admissions, although some suggested seeking state support for new types of assessment. One agent asked, "What is the cost?" That this individual was not associated with a state-related university may have significance since fears at such schools seem to be generated by apprehensions about huge numbers of students coming into the schools. It is the capability of the school to handle this influx of students rather than the cost of the open admissions process that is the cause of concern. Tuition costs might control this problem.

II. Counseling Services

Respondents saw as needs all types of counseling services explored, with both academic and vocational counseling having a very high priority. The respondents and particularly the agents were somewhat hesitant, however, to endorse the furnishing of these services by agencies other than institutions of higher education, which are generally responsible for supplying the service now. There was a small amount of support for having the state assume some responsibility for counseling services, but the overwhelming support was for institutional control.

In spite of the strong endorsement of the value of counseling services, many respondents were concerned about their cost. Respondents felt that a major increase in counseling would seriously increase the cost of lifelong learning programs. Suggestions on how to deal with this problem included involvement of state and federal governments, as well as local governmental units, and having the consumer bear a major part of the counseling costs. This last suggestion occurred quite frequently. Apparently, as in the open admissions question, respondents felt that adequate fees will limit frivolous use of the service. The fact that the consumer benefits substantially from this service also suggests that he or she be the one to pay. Most of the recommended counseling services are not now provided extensively, and the high starting costs would place great strains on already burdened institutional budgets.

III. Credit for Experience

This area was quite controversial, with agents in particular expressing negative views. It is not that they are opposed to awarding credit for life experience, but they are strongly opposed to loss of institutional control. They favored legitimization of experience for purposes of awarding credit only by the institution's faculty, but conceded that supplementary tests similar to CLEP should be developed. Consumers were substantially more liberal, but even they don't want legitimization by noneducational state agencies or counseling centers. The consortium idea received particularly strong support from consumers. Female respondents, whether agents or consumers, took a much more liberal stance on these issues. They were much more willing than their male counterparts to allow legitimization of credit by organizations other than the institution's faculty.

Some sort of standardization, possibly with the PDE in a leadership position, received strong support. Regarding supplementary tests, most respondents felt that new tests are needed, but a few felt that CLEP tests are adequate. The difficulty of administering this area was discussed at length. Many respondents seemed to feel that the candidate should assume much of the cost, with a good deal of help from the state. To try to summarize the feeling, it would seem that the student, being the primary beneficiary of this service, should assume the cost. Little opposition to state aid was expressed, but little willingness on the part of the institution to assume these costs surfaced, in contrast to some other areas of the survey.

IV. Financing

There was general and strong support for the availability of various sorts of financial aid for students. There was also some support for earmarking postsecondary education funds for lifelong learning. Such newer ideas as lower tuition, a voucher system, or using lifelong learning for vocational retraining had varying degrees of acceptance. None were viewed as particularly high priorities.

A majority of the agents responding opposed lower tuition, while a majority of consumers supported it. The group as a whole felt that placing higher education on the same financial basis as secondary education was not necessary; majorities of both groups expressed the same feeling. One comment that typified negative reaction in this area was, "Too much 'free or low-cost,' low-quality 'education' is currently offered." The feeling that the lifelong learner should carry his or her own load was quite prominent.

Respondents viewed help from outside sources, especially businesses, quite favorably, but the student is expected to assume as much of the burden as possible. There appeared to be some confusion about the vocational retraining need and the need to put postsecondary education on the same basis as secondary education, some respondents not knowing quite what these would involve.

V. Location of Courses

There was substantial agreement about the need to deliver courses to the students, but most of the delivery systems suggested entail rather high costs, e.g., television or filmed courses and mobile learning centers. Some respondents felt that media courses and correspondence courses were already being presented. The large number of people seeing them as needs, however, suggests that much more could be done. Respondents were not really sure whether the number of students reached would justify the cost of many of the projects suggested. The cost of media course production or mobile learning centers is high, as is the establishment of new facilities in unserved areas. There was considerable feeling that the state or federal government should contribute heavily to the cost of providing services of this type. Some felt that students should help with the cost, but apparently there was an understanding that the initial cost per student could be too great a burden.

VI. Special Kinds of Courses

There were three areas under this category, all perceived as needs. The idea that a school would have to make a special effort to create a desire in its students to take academic courses (e.g., arts and humanities) was confusing to some and offensive to others. This idea also proved offensive to participants discussing the survey at a lifelong learning conference held in Harrisburg during December 1976. While some individuals felt lifelong learning would be pursued by a broad range of people, others felt the market for services would be among people seeking vocational retraining.

The idea of parent-child-community courses was also confusing to many respondents. Like the question of creating demand, there was only a moderate priority placed on this need.

The strong priority in this category was remedial courses. Two interesting comments represent the reaction to these needs quite effectively. The first suggested that free market demand, and it alone, should determine any special kinds of courses to be offered. The second comment concerned remedial courses and their funding. This respondent felt that local public schools "who failed to teach in the first place" should be responsible for remedial courses and their funding.

VII. Transfer of Credit

Most respondents recognized the need for transfer of credit, but the avenue which should be taken was uncertain. The majority of the agents did not see statewide standardization of courses as a need, and only a small majority of consumers did. This contrasted with huge majorities of consumers perceiving as needs such ideas as a central credit bank, complete reciprocity and statewide or regional agreements among departments and institutions to accept one another's credit. Consumers are unanimous in their feeling that some means of standardizing acceptance of old credits must be developed. Agents in the group tended to favor agreements among institutions for acceptance of credit, while consumers preferred complete reciprocity or a credit bank.

One agent seemed to sum up one of the positions rather well, pointing out that "the 'currency' of higher education is not as uniform as the coin of the realm and is, therefore, harder to 'bank'." He also saw complete reciprocity as impossible, apparently because of his perception that some institutions will not accept standard definitions of what constitutes college-level work. This feeling may break down into a conflict between two- and four-year institutions. While all community college agents saw complete reciprocity as a need, agents from state and private colleges and state-related universities were about evenly divided on the issue. The agent mentioned above, while troubled by the lack of a standard definition of college work, remained strongly opposed to any statewide standardization. This suggests a strong degree of rigidity among some agents which may inhibit positive movement in the credit transfer area.

VIII. Other

The final section of the survey included miscellaneous ideas. Six different ideas were presented, some related to each other. There was interest in an adult education newsletter but confusion over who should publish it and who should receive it. Extra state support for public libraries was thought of as something that would develop naturally as a result of increased demand being made on library resources and facilities by increasing numbers of lifelong learners. Staff training to develop an atmosphere conducive to lifelong learning proved a high priority, as did consultation with the business community. Finally, elimination of time limits and residency requirements for degrees seemed to be rather strong needs. Agents held out for flexibility in these areas; they would opt for liberalization but not elimination. One agent was very concerned about teaching a course in which students took the prerequisite anywhere from one to ten years previously.

Discussion and Conclusions

The results of this survey must be considered in the context of the data source. The best way to determine the lifelong learning needs of the citizens of Pennsylvania would be to ask all of them precisely what they need. Since contacting all of these people or even a significant proportion of them is logistically impossible, our approach was to draw on the expertise of those who are currently working in the area and others representing potential consumer groups. In this limited group, the number of people contacted is still small. The expertise of those responding, however, makes what they have to say noteworthy.

Discussing the results by areas, one first encounters admission requirements. Open admission is a high priority need among consumers. They find some allies among agents associated with community colleges, many of which are currently operating under such circumstances. What resistance there is to this concept seems centered among respondents from private colleges and state-related universities. The reasons for resistance are open to speculation, but may best be considered in the context of later responses. One trend that runs throughout the survey is a strong feeling that state (or PDE) control over any school policy should be resisted as strongly as possible. Conceivably, it is the spectre of state control or a fear of being inundated with students that results in resistance to open admissions. That open admissions was the primary identified need of interest, however, is unquestionable. The fact that agents respond differently to it, depending on the type of school they are associated with, may have implications for educational policy if it is a true representation of administrative attitudes at those schools.

The strong support for development of new assessment techniques to produce measures of the potential, maturity and motivation of the lifelong learner suggests a need for work in this area. Responsibility for such research might rest with schools, but some respondents suggested contracting with test development firms, particularly the Educational Testing Service.

Counseling services are rated very highly as needs. Since those services that are currently provided are done incidentally or at minimal cost, a marked increase in counseling would greatly burden schools providing it. Many agents feel that the student, as principal beneficiary, should assume a large portion of the cost. Again, as with open admissions, this should act as a demand depressant. On the other hand, many of those most in need of counseling may be least able to afford it.

Credit for experience was another area in which the student benefits greatly from noninstructional services provided by the school. Opposition to this controversial need is not based so much on cost as on institutional control of credit award. The prevailing view is that an institution's faculty is the only body that should award credit, although some agents concede the value of such assessment tools as the CLEP tests. Here again, there is a feeling that adequate fees will limit demand for the service. Institutions in general do not want to become major assessors of life experience.

Transfer of credit was also quite controversial. Opposition to central control surfaced here, as it did under counseling and credit for experience. This raised the issue of whether all types of schools involved in the survey are in fact awarding the same type of credit. It became apparent that agents at some schools feel this is not the case. Such an attitude can be extremely counterproductive in attempting to arrive at complete reciprocity, credit banks, universal credit for the same type of experience and other factors that would facilitate the movement of lifelong learners within and among institutions. Resistance to limiting residency requirements on degrees is consistent with this general attitude.

There was some fairly general agreement that location of courses is important and that more effort should be made to reach students where they are. Courses could be offered at more convenient times and places. The major need was seen as remedial courses. The disagreement here was not on the need but on who should respond to it. Many respondents felt that the secondary schools rather than postsecondary schools should be responsible for remedial courses.

The area of finance is noteworthy for a particular attitude, having to do with "too much free or low-cost, low-quality education already being offered." This feeling turns up subtly in most of the other areas as agents demand that the lifelong learner "pick up the tab" for his or her education. Lifelong learning is a good idea, but it should not be given away. Respondents seemed to feel there may only be value in learning if it is hard to obtain.

Final Round Survey Responses (Agents)

Appendix A

Needs Suggested By Participants	Agent Responses (Percentages) Need Yes	Need No	Priority (If Need) High	Priority (If Need) Low
I. Admission Requirements:				
a) Open admissions to encourage all possible participants.	77	23	81	19
b) Provisional admission	45	55	60	40
c) More strict for academic and career pursuits, more relaxed for the student pursuing self-enrichment.	78	22	68	32
d) New types of assessment to determine potential, motivation, maturity rather than past educational experience	88	12	78	22
II. Counseling Services:				
a) Non-compulsory, competent direction of students' interests to satisfy course work.	81	19	71	29
b) Widespread availability including local access (time and distance)				
1) academic counseling,	95	5	89	11
2) personal counseling,	75	25	81	19
3) vocational counseling.	97	3	89	11
c) Non-academic facilities as counseling centers: (e.g., libraries, civic centers, high schools, etc.)	79	21	66	34
d) Counseling and referral services provided by agencies other than higher educational institutions.	78	22	59	41
III. Credit for Experience:				
a) Should be legitimized by:				
1) each institution's faculty,	82	18	89	11
2) consortia, regional or curricular,	50	50	67	33
3) single statewide consortium to achieve standardization,	51	49	78	22
4) Pennsylvania Department of Education,	38	62	64	36
5) other responsible state agencies,	17	83	40	60
6) counseling centers	28	72	88	12

Needs Suggested By Participants	Need		Priority (If Need)	
	Yes	No	High	Low
III. Credit for Experience: (Cont'd)				
b) Candidates should present a list of their competencies which can be measured for evaluation.	85	15	79	21
c) Supplementary tests to College Level Examination Program (CLEP) should be developed.	90	10	82	18
IV. Financing:				
a) Scholarships, low cost loans, financial aid should be more available to part-time and adult students.	98	2	90	10
b) A percentage of the state's postsecondary education funds should be earmarked specifically for Lifelong Learning.	81	19	77	23
c) Lower tuition.	44	56	86	14
d) Voucher System. (Certificate for adults to receive public funds to be spent for higher education as they wish.)	61	39	57	43
e) Lifelong Learning should become the major vocational retraining arm of the state.	51	49	53	47
f) The special needs of Lifelong Learners should be addressed in the distribution of financial aid.	87	13	77	23
g) Higher education should be put on the same financial basis as secondary education.	18	82	50	50
h) State tax breaks for contributing employers.	67	33	80	20
V. Location of Courses:				
a) Delivery of courses to the students:				
1) media courses,	87	13	66	34
2) courses by mail,	69	31	62	38
3) mobile learning centers,	72	28	50	50
4) community resources such as museums, meeting halls, churches, etc.	85	15	84	16

Appendix (Cont'd)

Needs Suggested By Participants	Need		Priority (If Need)	
	Yes	No	High	Low
V. Location of Courses: (Cont'd)				
b) Accessible by public transportation.	80	20	76	24
c) Establish new facilities in unserved areas.	78	22	63	37
d) Decide regionally by market research.	68	32	62	38
VI. Special Kinds of Courses:				
a) Create a demand among Lifelong Learning students for academic as well as career studies.	68	32	58	42
b) Remedial courses.	98	2	83	17
c) Parent-child-community courses.	75	25	59	41
VII. Transfer of Credit:				
a) Credit Bank. (A centralized depository for recording all of a student's academic credit, however awarded.)	74	26	61	39
b) Complete reciprocity among accredited institutions.	59	41	80	20
c) Statewide standardization of courses.	42	58	75	25
d) Statewide or regional agreements among departments to accept each other's credits.	72	28	83	17
e) Agreements between institutions to accept each other's credits (especially community to four-year colleges).	88	12	85	15
f) Standardization of acceptance of old credits.	62	38	80	20
VIII. Other				
a) Adult education newsletter	50	50	56	44
b) Extra state support for public libraries.	68	32	70	30

Appendix (Cont'd)

Needs Suggested By Participants	Need		Priority (If Need)	
	Yes	No	High	Low
VIII. Other (Cont'd)				
c) Preparation of faculty and younger students to create an atmosphere conducive to Lifelong Learning.	92	8	85	15
d) Eliminate time limits on degrees.	69	31	76	24
e) Eliminate degree residency requirements.	75	25	75	25
f) Consultation with business, government, industry to determine needs.	58	2	92	8

Final Round Survey Responses (Consumers)

Appendix B

Needs Suggested by Participants	Consumer Responses (Percentages) Need Yes	Need No	Priority (If Need) High	Priority (If Need) Low
I. Admission Requirements:				
a) Open admissions to encourage all possible participants.	75	25	93	7
b) Provisional admission	59	41	60	40
c) More strict for academic and career pursuits, more relaxed for the student pursuing self-enrichment.	78	22	69	31
d) New types of assessment to determine potential, motivation, maturity rather than past educational experience.	79	21	67	33
II. Counseling Services:				
a) Non-compulsory, competent direction of students' interests to satisfy course work.	84	16	56	44
b) Widespread availability including local access (time and distance)				
1) academic counseling,	100	0	76	24
2) personal counseling,	100	0	65	35
3) vocational counseling.	100	0	82	18
c) Non-academic facilities as counseling centers: (e.g. libraries, civic centers, high schools, etc.)	84	16	87	13
d) Counseling and referral services provided by agencies other than higher educational institutions.	79	21	73	27
III. Credit for Experience:				
a) Should be legitimized by:				
1) each institution's faculty,	54	46	83	17
2) consortia, regional or curricular,	50	50	50	50
3) single statewide consortium to achieve standardization,	92	8	73	27
4) Pennsylvania Department of Education,	69	31	75	25
5) other responsible state agencies,	18	82	50	50
6) counseling centers	40	60	50	50

Appendix (cont'd)

Needs suggested by Participants	Need Yes	Need No	Priority (If Need) High	Priority (If Need) Low
III. Credit for Experience: (cont'd)				
b) Candidates should present a list of their competencies which can be measured for evaluation.	84	16	67	33
c) Supplementary tests to College Level Examination Program (CLEP) should be developed.	88	12	67	33
IV. Financing:				
a) Scholarships, low cost loans, financial aid should be more available to part-time and adult students.	100	0	89	11
b) A percentage of the state's postsecondary education funds should be earmarked specifically for Lifelong Learning.	82	18	86	14
c) Lower tuition.	73	27	64	36
d) Voucher System. (Certificate for adults to receive public funds to be spent for higher education as they wish.)	61	39	73	27
e) Lifelong Learning should become the major vocational retraining arm of the state.	75	25	67	33
f) The special needs of Lifelong Learners should be addressed in the distribution of financial aid.	94	6	87	13
g) Higher education should be put on the same financial basis as secondary education.	44	56	57	43
h) State tax breaks for contributing employers.	78	22	77	23
V. Location of Courses:				
a) Delivery of courses to the students:				
1) media courses,	82	18	38	62
2) courses by mail,	72	28	33	67
3) mobile learning centers,	89	11	40	60
4) community resources such as museums, meeting halls, churches, etc.	95	5	75	25

Appendix (cont'd)

Needs Suggested by Participants	Need		Priority (If Need)	
	Yes	No	High	Low
V. Location of Courses: (cont'd)				
b) Accessible by public transportation.	89	11	86	14
c) Establish new facilities in unserved areas.	82	18	85	15
d) Decide regionally by market research.	79	21	73	27
VI. Special Kinds of Courses:				
a) Create a demand among Lifelong Learning students for academic as well as career studies.	81	19	69	31
b) Remedial courses.	90	10	83	17
c) Parent-child-community courses.	84	16	56	44
VII. Transfer of Credit:				
a) Credit Bank. (A centralized depository for recording all of a student's academic credit, however awarded.)	100	0	72	28
b) Complete reciprocity among accredited institutions.	90	10	88	12
c) Statewide standardization of courses.	59	41	70	30
d) Statewide or regional agreements among departments to accept each other's credits.	88	12	80	20
e) Agreements between institutions to accept each other's credits (especially community to four-year colleges).	94	6	81	19
f) Standardization of acceptance of old credits.	100	0	72	28
VIII. Other				
a) Adult education newsletter	71	29	58	42
b) Extra state support for public libraries.	72	28	62	38

Appendix (cont'd)

Needs Suggested by Participants	Need		Priority (If Need)	
	Yes	No	High	Low
VIII. Other (cont'd)				
c) Preparation of faculty and younger students to create an atmosphere conducive to Lifelong Learning.	78	22	92	8
d) Eliminate time limits on degrees.	74	26	46	54
e) Eliminate degree residency requirements.	79	21	40	60
f) Consultation with business, government, industry to determine needs.	95	5	82	18